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COULD BIPEDALISM BE INITIAL ?

by

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From **Plato**'s dialogue "*Timaeus*" we learn why man is bipedal and other mammals quadrupedal. Creating man, the gods first produced a round object, "we now term the head", as "the most divine part of us and the lord of all that is in us". In order that the head "might not tumble about among the high and deep places of the earth but might be able to get over the ones and out of the other, they provided the body to be its vehicle and means of locomotion". The body "was furnished with four limbs extended and flexible; these God contrived to be instruments of locomotion with which it might take hold and find support and so be able to pass through all places, carrying on high the dwelling place of the most sacred and divine part of us. Such was the origin of legs and hands, which for this reason were attached to every man".

That's the very beginning of the initial theory of *Initial Bipedalism*. Then follows description of the *Dehumanization* process. But first, "of the men who came into the world, those who were cowards or led unrighteous lives were changed into women "in the second generation". "Thus were created women and the female sex in general".

"The race of birds were created out of innocent lightminded men, who, although their minds are directed toward heaven, imagined, in their simplicity, that the clearest demonstration of the things above was to be obtained by sight; these were remodelled and transformed into birds, and they grew feathers instead of hair".

"The race of wild pedestrian animals, again, came from those who had no philosophy in any of their thoughts, and never considered at all about the nature of the heavens, because they had ceased to use the course of the head, but followed the guidance of those parts of the soul which are in the breast. In consequence of these habits of theirs they had front legs and their heads resting upon the earth to which they were drawn by natural affinity... And this was the reason why they were created quadrupedal and polypods: God gave the more senseless of them the more support that they might be more attracted by the earth. And the most foolish of them, who trail their bodies entirely upon the ground and have no longer any need of feet, he made without feet to crawl upon the earth".

"These are the laws by which all animals pass into one another now, as in the beginning, changing as they lose or gain wisdom and folly".

The strength of this theory is in its openly creationist and didactic character. Accordingly, it states clearly and succinctly what happened and why. A critic and detractor can hardly find any loophole in it. If you query, for example, why God did not provide man with wings, so that the head "might not tumble about", Plato could have answered "Ask God, not me". If you asked why on earth God's creations "led unrighteous lives", the author of the theory could have dwelt at length on the gift of free will which God bestowed upon man. Whether you accept the argument or not, it's a theological problem, and shouldn't bother us here.

What really concerns me is a modern version of *Initial Bipedalism*, proclaimed for over a decade in *BIPEDIA*. In contrast to Plato's thought, the modern theory claims a biological status, and therefore it can and must be analyzed from the viewpoint of modern biology.

First of all, let us note its considerable similarity with Plato's theory. Both "scenarios" focus on the initial appearance of the head and postulate a process of dehumanization, depending on the state and condition of the head. But if in the initial version of *Initial Bipedalism* the head is the product of God's will and skill (who can refute that?!), the modern variant proclaims the appearance of a hominid head by way of a natural process, taking place, of all places, in water: "Such a round configuration, as the human head, could only develop naturally in water" (*BIPEDIA*, **9**, p. 16).

The head is said to have developed on a creature, dubbed "*marine homonculus*", in the following way: "In the course of the phylogenetical history of the marine homonculus, we can suppose that a floating organ developed on the top of its body, as a 'bubble', like in a medusa (*Ibidem*, p. 15). As a result, the homonculus acquired not only a brainy head but also "bipedal gait and orthograde body position": "The homonculus, at its *archepagoge* stage, had just developed its brain, skull and limbs. The spinal column, quite upright, was ossified before the prehominid left the water" (*BIPEDIA*, **3**, p. 20).

Now, can we swallow that? To my mind, the natural appearance of a real head on a floating, medusa-like body is as likely as a real head growing on a tree. The head is the place of the brain; the brain is the headquarters of the nervous system; the nervous system is developed in actively moving bodies (in animals, not plants, in squids, not oisters, in fish, not jellyfish). For active and fast swimming in water a body has to be torpedo-shaped and held horizontally, not vertically (upright), with the brain in the front part, not the top part, of the body. And this for the same reason that the driver of a car and the pilot of a plane take the front seat. So, short of a divine miracle, the marine homonculus is a phantom.

Now let us see what evidence and reasons are given by modern *Initial Bipedalism* in its favour and against *Initial Quadrupedalism*. The main biological evidence is borrowed from embryology. If Darwin and his followers referred to facts of embryology in support of evolution, then *Initial Bipedalism* attempts to use this very tool to overthrow Darwinism. In this connection, it is worthwhile to listen to S.J. Gould, who warns against jumping to conclusions, as regards adult forms, in interpreting embryological data: "The embryonic

features that we share with all vertebrates represent *no previous adult state*, only the unaltered identity of early development. Though they do not allow us to trace the actual course of our descent in any way, they are full of evolutionary significance nonetheless; for, as Darwin argued, community of embryonic structure reveals community of descent". (My emphasis - D.B.)

Some other reasons of *Initial Bipedalism* are purely psychological and Platonic. "So far nothing has really been said about the role of the mind in the evolution which led from a water creature through to the first land-dwelling vertebrate". That water creature "was a biped and big-headed pre-hominidid (*homonculus*), characterized by a sense of curiosity and definite mental dispositions". *Homonculus* "must have had a real motivation to enter and discover a new and hostile environment..." And this in contrast and opposition to the recognized version of evolution, proclaiming "a strange fish with growing legs", allegedly "capable of setting about the impossible task of mastering the difficulties of living on dry land". "Would such a fish really have wanted to leave the water?" (*BIPEDIA*, **3**, pp. 17, 18; **4**, p. 20).

These pronouncements speak for themselves and need no comment, except one: *Initial Bipedalism* misunderstands and misinterprets *Initial Quadrupedalism*, along with the whole of Darwin's theory. No evolutionist ever takes the metaphor of "fish leaving the water" literally. Actually, the phrase means the opposite: "the water leaving the fish" or "the fish left out of the water", so that it had to survive, first in shallow water, then some periods without water, gradually developing an amphibian way of life.

According to *Initial Quadrupedalism*, the first land-dwelling vertebrate was a newt-like quadrupedal creature. It could not be any other, in particular, because of the difference in the force of gravity in the water and on land. It was quadrupedal for the same reason that tables, chairs and beds are four-legged: for better balance and stability. In the history of civilization tripods appear after four-legged furniture, in transportation tricycles and bicycles after four wheeled vehicles. And in the animal world, dinosaurs and kangaroos, supported by two legs and the tail, appeared after a long evolution of quadrupedal locomotion.

Bipedalism per se, evinced by birds and some higher primates, is even further removed from initial quadrupedalism, with its obvious stability. This feat of balance could not have been achieved without a paramount evolutionary necessity: the transformation of forelimbs into wings in birds and into arms and hands in hominids. Babies, elderly humans and drunks demonstrate that it takes a special mechanism in the brain and its good working to achieve and maintain steady bipedal walking. The subtlety and complexity of bipedality is hinted by the fact that, with all modern high technology, walking robots have not yet evolved any near the ease and grace of a human gait.

According to *Initial Bipedalism*, the first land-dwelling animal looked like... well, see *BIPEDIA*, **3**, p. 19. It shows a Homonculus looking for all the world like the little hero of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's exquisite tale "*Le Petit Prince*"! The only difference is the absence of clothes on the homonculus.

After his life on a tiny asteroid, and flight through space in weightlessness, the Little Prince suffers no discomfort from the Earth's powerful gravity. The author of a fancy tale is not bothered by such a "detail". But the author of the Homonculus should be. I mean the impact of gravity on the "initial biped", if we accept for a moment its origin in the water and exit from it. Gravity would immediately have started to "dehumanize" the nice little fellow and force him to move on all fours.

Yet *Initial Bipedalism* insists that man's ancestors were never quadrupedal. "The theory of Initial Bipedalism meaning that the first mammals were bipeds, is quite embarrassing because it just indicates the opposite of what most people usually admit. Man is descended from such quadrupedal apes of the Miocene forests...".
"We suggest that man's ancestral line went through a former phase of living in the water before climbing ashore to become the biped hominid" (*BIPEDIA*, **16**, p. 1).

This means there was no arboreal stage in man's phylogeny. And how about numerous morphological traits, common for man and other primates, and derived from the arboreal way of life? Dermatoglyphs are the most easily demonstrable of these. As primate hands are equipped with nails, not claws, dermatoglyphs serve to increase friction between the hands and branches of trees, making tree-climbing more secure. Man, along with all primates and in distinction from other mammals, has dermatoglyphs not only on the palms of hands but also on the soles of feet. How could these have appeared and for what purpose if man's ancestors have always been bipedal and never lived in trees?

If bipedalism is initial and quadrupedalism subsequent, why then is a foal able to stand and walk almost immediately after birth, while a human baby crawls for about a year and is unable to become bipedal without the adults' help? Shouldn't it by the other way round?

No, it should not, because *Initial Bipedalism* makes no more sense than Initial Flying. Both flying and bipedalism in the animal world could only be achieved in a long and later, not initial, process of evolution.

The modern version of the *Initial Bipedalism* theory lacks the impact of its ancient predecessor because it is neither openly creationist nor really evolutionist. Sitting between two stools, it's a caricature of both creationism and evolutionism.

They say an ugly little fact can kill a beautiful theory. *Initial Bipedalism*, faced with a host of murderous facts, makes me wonder how it has managed to survive for so long. I guess it has been saved so far by the small print of *BIPEDIA* publications, making the theory inconspicuous and hidden from the eyes of evolutionary biology.

Being myself an unorthodox researcher, I oppose the *Initial Bipedalism* theory not because it is unorthodox, but because I find it to be of a destructive, not constructive, quality for science. This theory reveals not the workings of Nature but "definite mental dispositions" of its authors and proponents.

Naturally, anyone is free to proclaim and support any hypothesis, including that of *Initial Bipedalism*, but the latter has no place in cryptozoology and hominology, which are based on evolutionary theory, with Darwinism in its core.

[April 1999]

References: - The Dialogues of Plato, Sphere Books, London 1970, vol. 3, Timaeus (44, 45, 90-92).
- Gould, S.J. Ontogeny and Phylogeny, 1977, p. 213.
- *BIPEDIA*, **3**, **4**, **9**, **16**.

Notice of the Editor: The debate will be prosecuted in the next issue of *BIPEDIA*. Comments and responses can be submitted to the Editor: François de Sarre, C.E.R.B.I., 32 ave Buenos-Ayres, 06000 Nice (France).

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PROBLEMAS CIENTIFICOS DE "*LAS MONTANAS DE LA LOCURA*" DE LOVECRAFT

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INTRODUCCION

Hace poco tiempo publicamos un artìculo, en el que tratabamos de una interpretaciòn socio-polìtica, de la novela "*La sombra sobre Innsmouth*", escrita por Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937). Ahora queremos tratar sobre la novela del mismo autor "*En las montanas de la locura*", pero bajo una perspectiva diferente al anterior artìculo. Pretendemos ocuparnos, no de problemas polìticos, sino de diversos temas cientìficos, que son tratados en esa novela, que es màs de ciencia-ficciòn que de terror. Puesto que en el otro artìculo, tratamos de la vida de Lovecraft, y tambièn de las generalidades de su obra, no serà necesario que esta vez, tengamos que detenernos en esos aspectos.